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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

SUBJECT: SPEAKER DOWNPLAYS PARLIAMENT DISSOLUTION RUMORS;  
SHARES VIEWS ON IRAQ, IRAN, LEBANON, AND PALESTINIANS

REF: STATE 77015

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

**¶1.** (C/NF) Summary: Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi told the Ambassador June 5 he did not think the Kuwaiti Amir would dissolve Parliament, despite his frustration with opposition MPs' constant attacks against the Government. Al-Khorafi believed if there was a dissolution it would be constitutional and new elections would be held within two months. Al-Khorafi stressed the importance of U.S. dialogue with Iran, Syria, and Saudi Arabia on Iraq. He also encouraged engagement with Syria on Lebanon and urged the U.S. to do more to support Palestinian President Abbas. End summary.

**¶2.** (C/NF) In a June 5 meeting with the Ambassador, Speaker of Parliament Jassem Al-Khorafi downplayed rumors that the Amir would dissolve Parliament due to opposition MPs' expected "grilling" of Oil Minister Shaykh Ali Al-Jarrah Al-Sabah. "The possibility of a dissolution is there, but I don't think the Amir will do it at this stage," he said. Although the Amir personally asked members of the National Action Bloc and the Popular Action Bloc to postpone the grilling, Al-Khorafi said they had put themselves into a difficult position by publicly pledging not to back down unless the beleaguered Oil Minister resigned, and predicted they would still submit the grilling request on June 10.

**¶3.** (C/NF) Al-Khorafi did not think the MPs could get the 25 votes needed to pass a no-confidence motion on the Minister, but acknowledged that this could change if they questioned Shaykh Ali on more than one issue and/or the Minister responded poorly to their questions. (Note: So far, the pretext for the grilling has been Shaykh Ali's public remarks regarding his respect for a former scandal-ridden Oil Minister, Shaykh Ali Al-Khalifa Al-Sabah. End note.) The Speaker noted, though, that the Government still had options: ask the Oil Minister to resign, assign him to a different ministerial portfolio, or work to defeat a no-confidence vote. He believed if there was a dissolution, new elections would be held within 60 days as per constitutional procedures. (Comment: The Speaker's Chief of Staff told PolOff after the meeting that they were waiting anxiously to find out whether or not Parliament would be dissolved, suggesting that a dissolution may be more likely than the Speaker indicated. End comment.)

**¶4.** (C/NF) The Speaker did not think the composition of Parliament would change significantly in any future elections under the new five constituency electoral system approved last summer. He predicted more Islamists would be elected because they would be able to pool voters previously spread out across the smaller districts. He also believed

independents would have a tougher time getting elected and competition among liberal groups could reduce their election chances. The Speaker argued against the adoption of a quota system for female candidates, which he said would require a constitutional amendment. He attributed the fact that women were not elected in last summer's elections to the prevalence of conservative social views and the fact that women did not vote for female candidates, and predicted that the women's vote would again benefit Islamists.

¶15. (C/NF) Al-Khorafi criticized the weakness of the Government and the Prime Minister, who he said was trying to please everyone but had ended up pleasing no one. He also complained about MPs' focus on obtaining benefits for their constituents, saying, "We have to wake up and be aware that (the high price of oil) will not last, and putting burdens on the budget will create problems for the future."

Iraq/Iran

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¶16. (C/NF) Asked about the Baghdad Security Plan, the Ambassador said it was too soon to judge progress and cautioned there was still a long way to go. He reported that we were talking with a wide variety of groups in Iraq, including increasingly with Sunnis. The Speaker said former Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi had recently visited Kuwait to build support for his new coalition and he had been surprised that Allawi was even in discussions with Moqtada Al-Sadr. The Ambassador argued that while many in the region were suspicious of Al-Maliki, he was the legitimately-elected leader of Iraq and should be supported. He also noted that representatives of Al-Sadr would likely travel to Kuwait in the near future and urged Al-Khorafi to tell them to stop

KUWAIT 00000889 002 OF 002

their violent activities and reduce their interactions with Iran (reftel). The Speaker pointed out that Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani also played an important moderating role, particularly with Al-Sadr. He said Ammar Al-Hakim was "bright," but questioned his ability to lead the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC). Al-Khorafi emphasized the importance of engaging Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia on Iraq, and praised Speaker Pelosi's trip to Syria and her interest in visiting Iran.

¶17. (C/NF) The Speaker stressed that the U.S. must understand the Iranian mentality and political dynamics. "You cannot talk to them the way you talk to others in the region," he argued, noting that U.S. policies had at times strengthened Iranian "revolutionaries" against the "moderates." Al-Khorafi urged the U.S. to give Iran a way to "save face" on the nuclear issue. On the U.S.-Iran meeting in Baghdad, the Speaker expressed concern that the focus was not on "the core of the problem," and instead both sides were merely trying to show the other that they would not relent. He again emphasized the need for dialogue to resolve problems with Iran and said he planned to have a "frank discussion" with Iranian Speaker of Parliament Haddad-Ali when he visits Kuwait next week.

Lebanon

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¶18. (C/NF) Al-Khorafi said Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri told him recently that he was worried about the possibility of another civil war breaking out in Lebanon. Al-Khorafi asked if the international tribunal was worth the effort, given how long it would take to come to a conclusion on Hariri's assassination and the problems it was creating in Lebanon. The Ambassador stressed that the tribunal was based in a UN resolution supported by the international community. Al-Khorafi emphasized the importance of engaging, not isolating, Syria in order to bring stability to Lebanon. He also urged the U.S. not to take Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah lightly, noting that he had emerged from the

conflict with Israel last summer as a symbol of resistance in the Muslim world unrivaled by any Arab leader.

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Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

¶ 9. (C/NF) Asked about progress towards a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Ambassador cautioned that, while we were still focused and involved on the issue, political developments in both Israel and the Palestinian territories were hampering efforts to move forward on the peace process. Al-Khorafi urged the U.S. to do more to support Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and prevent the Israelis from "embarrassing" him. He argued that the USG's decision to stop financial aid and not support the national unity government had further undermined Abbas' position. The Ambassador said we continued to support Abbas and provide assistance to the Palestinians, but were firmly committed to opposing Hamas.

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LeBaron